

The Alternative Guide to the Universe

During the autumn of 1890 Claude Monet was busy changing the destiny of the 20th century. He had just started work on his 'series' paintings, *The Rouen Cathedral*, *Views of London Bridge*, and *The Haystacks*, bought a plot of land at Giverny and became obsessed with the idea of painting a somewhat curious subject matter – the light between him and the object. After endless ruminations, he finally got his breakthrough and decided that in order paint light he had to depict the landmarks of his choice at various times of the day, so as to capture their context, the very way light modifies their reality. At the end of that productive autumn, in a letter to his friend, filled with a great sense of self assurance, he felt obliged to mention his newfound ability to see and represent “what I'd call ‘instantaneity’, the *enveloppe*, [...] light, spread over everything.”

As radical as it was, it did not take long for his idea of a dispositional field to resonate in the world of philosophy, and before long, via the works of William James and his fringe theory of thought, the work of Gestalt psychologists, Nietzsche usurpation of the primacy of consciousness and Freud's theory of the unconscious, it seemed that everyone that mattered in philosophy was enamoured with the concepts of context and background-foreground dialectics.

Fast forward then to Paris in the 1940 where phenomenology reigned supreme and the idea of an unseen structure that influences every act of perception, cognition and even social existence caught roots in the fertile mind of Maurice Merleau-Ponty. In a paper called “The Visible and the Invisible” he named it for the first time as the “membrure”, the inner structure that affects every experience of the visible, not its contradiction, but it's in-visible. What his intellectual endeavours conceptualised and clarified was that in order to understand a particular phenomenon one has to include the fringes as well as the apparent centre, the sides, the extraneous, the loose, the repressed.

2013 and it seems that London has fallen in love with the membrure of art and science, the unseen mavericks that operate at the fringes of our world, because the new show at the Hayward Gallery's “The Alternative Guide to the Universe” neatly follows the Welcome Collection's “Souzou: Outsider Art from Japan” levels of public success.

The Alternative Guide focuses on the works of self taught architects, physicists and inventors who hovered in an undefined epistemological no man's land of their respective disciplines, a land of creative freedom and feral imagination for whom the only obstacles are their own rational constraints and our much too prosaic definitions of balance.

To illustrate this point, the first highlights of the display are two works by Marcell Storr entitled Diptych and Triptych. Working by day as a street sweeper, Storr was tormented by visions of a nuclear apocalypse and his febrile imagination produced urban plans and images of the new buildings that would be the cornerstones of an eventual reconstruction of his beloved Paris. Despite the gloomy conceptual prologue to his creations, they are luminous pieces and works of immense optimism, reflected in the natural tones of tawny greens and brown, and in the aspirational grandeur of the designs

As we move forwards through the gallery to the photographs of Richard Grave's shelters and houses (built entirely out of reclaimed wood and disposed of objects), we are invited to ponder an alternative to Storr's works. Grave's buildings are symphonies of clutter and visual noise, the avatars of an obsessive mind that hoards and gathers but the strength of the works is a political

one as they achieve a representation of desperation, an invitation to question our culture of avarice.

Further along the works of A.G Rizzoli, which are based on the concept of his perfect world entitled Y.T.T.E (Yield To Total Elation), are pristinely drawn architectural plans based on personal experiences and people in his life: for example “Mother symbolically recaptured/the Cathedral” or a work based on his first encounter of a the female genitalia. They are in Freudian terms works of effusive sublimation, an obsessive perfectionist type of sublimation, that created visions of “superior beauty and permanency” out of the conflictual dispositions of author’s mind and his very own architectures of emotion.

As we advance to the higher levels of the gallery, as if in a spatial metaphor, we are invited to contemplate the more abstract levels of existence described in the works of James Carter (who believes that the building blocks of matter are ring like structures he named circlons) or Phillip Blackmarr’s “Quantum Drawings”, works of spectacular detail that illustrate his vision of a universe based on geometrical patterns, a representation of his desire for order and precision.

These final works, through their complexity and metaphorical value, achieve an unlikely critique of the very expectations of the viewer, who will strive to make rational sense of the pieces on display, by asking nothing more of us than an aesthetic contemplation and an intuitive understanding of the great unknown that they encompass.

All these works and the others on display shine an eccentric light on the unseen corners of our world, and bring forward the repressed materials of an utilitarian world. They are I believe the dispositional field, the membrure of our society and of our ideologies and if you see one show this year, make it this one, as it offers us a glimpse into a world that the majority of us will not see, under the dead weight of intellectual prejudice and the blinding attributes of the visible and obvious.